

Frequently Asked Questions about the California Interactive Broadband Map

Q: The map used to show as a default multiple colors indicating downstream broadband availability when I launched it. What happened to it?

A: There used to be three default layers whenever you launched the interactive map (wireline, fixed wireless, and mobile). Many users complained about having to open the “Layers” menu to turn off those layers every time they used the interactive map, so we decided to display the default map without any layers enabled as a default.

Q: When I do an address lookup to see what providers are available at my home, the list of providers is wrong, or the speeds listed are not available where I live.

A: For wireline providers, the data we collect from providers is at the census block level or road segment level, depending on the size of the census block. In urban areas, a census block is generally the same size as a city block, but in rural areas, census blocks may be significantly larger. For census blocks greater than 2 square miles, we use road segments. We use a 300 foot buffer for each road segment and determine service availability based on that. For wireless providers, we collect data in the form of vector files or tower locations and rely on computer generated coverage predictions to estimate service coverage and availability. We do not currently have data more detailed than that (e.g. at the address level). This means it is possible that broadband service may be available to a household on your census block but the service is not available to your own home. In this case, we encourage you to fill out the Broadband Survey, which may be found in the Address Lookup tool (house-shaped icon at the top of the screen). You will see a survey prompt in the upper left hand corner after you enter your address.

Q: If service is available to someone on my block but not to my home, then isn't the map wrong?

A: The map is intended to be a starting point for discussion. It is also used by CASF applicants and staff as a tool to look up necessary demographic and broadband information by census block and census block group. The map itself is never the final word in determining CASF eligibility or in deciding which areas of California are un-served and under-served.

Q: Does the CPUC do anything with the data they receive from providers, or do they simply just publish it on the map?

A: The CPUC has no regulatory authority over broadband service, and the data shown on the map is provided voluntarily. However, if you've spent any time using the interactive map, you will see a number of map validation tools available online.

CPUC staff use a seven-step process, based on FCC and third party databases, to validate fixed broadband availability data. The results of the validation are available for display on the map using the Drill tool. Both availability and downstream speed are shown, as well as the estimated percent of households contained in the un-validated areas based on the 2010 Census.

For mobile broadband, we drive across the state twice a year through urban, rural and tribal areas to measure actual end user experience available at over 1,900 test locations. The tests confirm the existence (or lack) of service, and the data speeds actually available at that time and location for the four major mobile providers. Using the results from that testing, we employ a model that estimates likely upstream and downstream speeds in areas between the test locations. In areas where the test results and our predictions differ significantly from data submitted by mobile providers, we provide a visual representation.

In addition to drive testing, we have created a free mobile app called “CalSPEED,” which is available through the Apple Store on iPhone and through the Google Play store on Android. Users can run their own speed tests, and the test results will be shown on the Interactive Map after 24 hours.

There is also a Public Feedback Layer that displays user and CASF consortia feedback regarding broadband availability at the census block level.

Q: What are the definitions of “Un-served” and “Under-served?”

A: On February 1, 2012 the Commission approved D.12-02-015, which changed the definition of an underserved area to be where broadband is available, but no wireline or wireless facilities-based provider offers service at advertised speeds of at least 6 megabits per second download and 1.5 megabits per second upload. “Un-served” areas are where the advertised speeds fall below combined 768 kilobits per second downstream and 200 kilobits per second upstream.